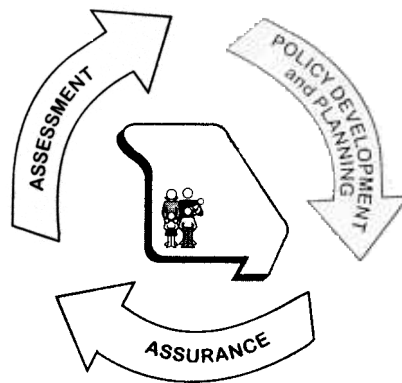




FOR 2000 AND BEYOND

Missouri Department of Health

STRENGTHENING MISSOURI'S PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM



prepared by
The Center for Local Public Health Services
Missouri Department of Health

January 2000

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Missouri Department of Health at 573/751-6170.



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Dear Public Health Friends:

Welcome to the world of public health. We are pleased to provide introductory information regarding the "core functions" of public health. These core functions reflect the very heart of our mission and responsibilities. It is critically important to all of the citizens of Missouri that we maintain a strong and capable public health system in order to promote health and to prevent illness and outbreaks. We accomplish this through surveillance, early detection of communicable diseases, prevention of potential biological contamination, and monitoring the health status indicators that measure how our population is faring.

As you review the definitions of the core functions you will see that assessment, policy development/planning and assurance are functional elements that are interwoven into all public health activities and programs. They represent structured, comprehensive methods of identification, analysis and resolution of problems facing public health now and in the future.

As the delivery of illness-care services evolves from the traditional fee-for-service to a managed care environment, it is critical that we focus upon and support preventive health measures. That is what public health is all about. As we meet the challenges posed by bioterrorism, global travel and the emergence of new and re-emergence of old communicable diseases, it is crucial that we have in place a system to monitor the situation at the community level and be prepared to intervene.

The Center for Local Public Health Services of the Department of Health stands ready to provide technical assistance and direction to the statewide system of local public health agencies (LPHAs). There is a LPHA serving each county within the state and they are ready and willing to work toward protecting the health of their communities. The enclosed map of the state of Missouri notes the location of the 6 district offices, as well as the name, address and telephone number of the District Health Directors. They, too, are available to assist you with your public health needs and questions.

Thank you for your interest in the public health of all of our citizens.

Sincerely,

Maureen Dempsey, M.D.

Director

Missouri Department of Health

Public Health

Missouri is witnessing changes in the way individual health care is provided. These changes are being brought about, in part, because of spiraling cost increases that have occurred in medical care over several decades. Between 1980 and 1998, for example, inflation costs for medical care have increased an average of 9.3% per year, a rate 48.4% higher than the average inflation rate for all other items.

For many of our citizens and neighbors, access to routine health care is limited. An estimated 669,000 (1997) Missourians have limited or no access to basic health services. Cost is the principal barrier for many. Missouri also has many counties that have limited health resources, particularly primary care practitioners. This creates a barrier for many who are unable to travel to other communities to receive care.

Fortunately, Missouri has a strong statewide system for delivery of public health services. Public health services are offered in every county in our state. Public health, and its benefits to Missourians, is not well understood by many of us, however. Most people can associate public health as immunizations for children and inspections of restaurants. Others see public health as the dedicated “county nurse” visiting the infirmed in their homes. But few realize the broad range of activities public health involves. And even though public health has been officially serving Missouri since 1883, it is an irony that the better public health works, the more invisible it becomes to the people it serves.

Actually, public health is a very sophisticated and complicated science for identifying and dealing with real or potential health threats to the community and its citizens. Its focus is PREVENTION and its client is the community. While medical care treats the individual, public health treats the community.

As medical care changes, so will the demands on public health agencies. Those responsibilities that have been traditional public health services need to be clearly redefined and reconfirmed by public health professionals. We need to make sure that the public dollar is used in the most effective way possible. We also need to help our communities understand and make the best use of new health care systems as they are developing in local areas. The purpose of this booklet is to discuss how public health is preparing to meet the future needs of Missouri and of our most valuable resource, our citizens.

Core Public Health Functions

What are they?

The Core Functions of Public Health are the standards each public health agency in Missouri will use to guarantee competent public health practices for their local communities. This will be the standard of practice for all public health agencies and the minimum level of service that each Missourian can expect to receive for his or her tax dollar.

Who developed them?

The state health director formed a work group of public health professionals to identify and define the basic standards and elements of public health. As a result of their hard work, a detailed description of core public health functions was developed and is being shared with local health agencies statewide.

Why are core functions important?

As health care systems are reorganized and reshaped, it is crucial that public health activities are preserved. For example, outbreaks of communicable diseases must be controlled by constant and ongoing statewide surveillance. Once a disease is detected, public health professionals instantly react and take the measures necessary to limit its spread. Stopping the spread of diseases has been one of public health's many success stories. This is a function that cannot be lost in the shuffle of changing health care systems.

Just as every other business, public health agencies must advertise what they do. Because public health is successful at preventing sickness, its work often goes unnoticed. Because the public doesn't hear about these prevention activities in the media, it assumes that serious outbreaks and illnesses do not happen anymore. To combat this untrue perception, public health must define those essential services that it needs to do to keep Missourians healthy and productive. Core public health functions are those services.

What are the core functions of public health?

There are three basic core functions that each public health agency must be able to perform to protect the health of their communities. Each agency must be able to professionally:

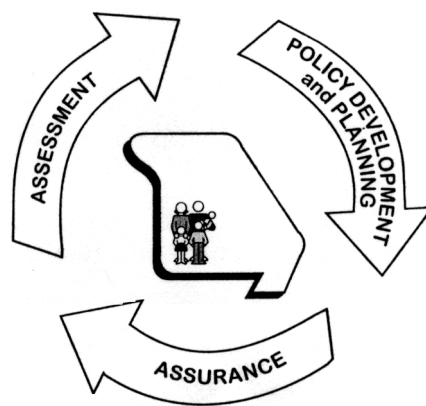
Assess the health of their communities, identifying current illnesses and real or potential threats to the citizens;

Make wise and prudent **policies** to deal with real or potential threats to the communities' health; and

Assure that these policies are carried out and that their communities are healthy and safe places for families to grow and prosper.

It sounds simple, doesn't it! Actually, operating under a system of core functions is the basic way that nearly all successful programs and businesses are structured. For example, an automobile maker will do extensive surveys (assessment) to find out what the public wants and will buy. They have automotive engineers to develop how to build the car (make policy) and then they build the cars and get them out in showrooms (assurance) so the public can buy them and the business can make money. And if the cars don't sell as planned, they must then reassess where they went wrong and how to fix it. This is an ongoing process.

Obviously, public health is not a profit-making business like General Motors, Ford or Chrysler, but it is a public business that also needs to be effectively and efficiently operated. As taxpayers, we pay the bill before we get the services and we all deserve to receive those services in the most efficient way possible. The development of core functions is the public health system's way of making sure that we are able to meet the demands of protecting the public's health. Greater detail on core functions and what they represent are on the following pages.



The Core Function of Assessment

Why is assessment important?

To be able to do your job, you need to know what's going on around you. We all know intelligent people who seem to have problems because they don't look at the big picture. They are focused only on the details of getting the job done.

A public health agency cannot afford to focus only on the details. It must see the big picture of what is occurring within the community. For example, it must be able to quickly recognize potential problems like environmental hazards, unclean food establishments, unhealthy living conditions or reports of unusual sicknesses or deaths.

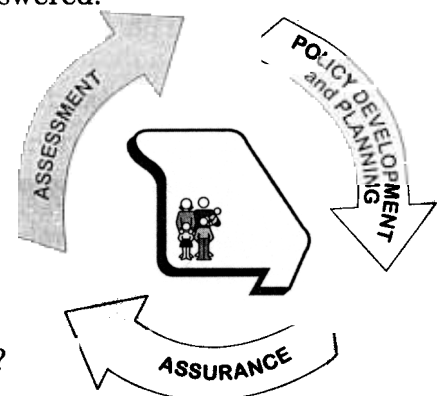
Not only must it be able to see the real or potential problems, the health department must also be able to professionally interpret health information and data to determine the degree of hazard or threat that exists or where health services might be needed. It must be able to compare local health data with state information to determine if there is a local problem. The state health department likewise needs to compare state data to national information.

Just collecting and analyzing the data, however, is not enough. The public health agency must be able to get the appropriate information into the hands of health professionals and providers, policy makers, and community leaders so that informed decisions and actions can be made.

For a public health agency or system to have a positive impact on Missouri's health, we must collect accurate and timely health data, make intelligent analyses of that data, and make sure that responsible leaders and professionals understand the ramifications of that information.

Through the assessment process, the following questions are answered:

- ✓ What are the major health problems?
- ✓ What population groups are at risk?
- ✓ How are risks distributed geographically?
- ✓ What services are available?
- ✓ What is the quality of available services?
- ✓ Are health resources adequate?
- ✓ What do local citizens see as health concerns?
- ✓ What do health providers see as community health issues?



What will be required to do a health assessment?

The Core Public Health Functions Task Force has defined the core function of Assessment as:

Regular and systematic collecting, analyzing, and interpreting of population-based data to identify health issues and resources and disseminating this information to individuals, organizations, and communities.

To carry out this function, we will need to do the following:

Principal Elements	Key Activities
<i>Data Collection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Assess population-based health status and its determinates.⇒ Develop standards and methods of collecting data to ensure reliability, comparability, and validity.⇒ Assess community health care delivery by developing and maintaining data systems for capacity, availability, quality, cost, and utilization of health resources.⇒ Identify barriers to utilization of health services.
<i>Data Analysis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Examine assessment data.⇒ Examine resource capacities.⇒ Draw inferences from data.⇒ Analyze and coordinate available community resources.
<i>Data Analysis Dissemination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Report results of analysis to appropriate audiences, including state/local health care providers.⇒ Respond to requests for information.
<i>Data Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Continually improve the quality, utilization, and access to data.⇒ Develop and maintain the infrastructure necessary to support the data systems.

The Core Function of Policy Development and Planning

Why is policy development and planning important?

An organization can only be as effective as its internal ability to make wise and informed decisions based upon competent information, data and public input. While assessment can be considered the “eyes and ears” of the health agency, the policy development and planning function relates to its “brains,” or reasoning ability.

Policy development is a process in which the “plans of action” of an agency are formulated, disseminated and made ready for implementation. The state legislature, for example, is performing the policy development function when it deliberates and passes legislation. These laws express the formal policy of the state that has been adopted by our lawmakers on many matters that affect all of us.

Within the public health system, particularly at the local/community level, the development of policy rests with the local health department Board of Trustees, the local County Commission or City Council, depending upon the legal constitution of the health agency. At the state level, the State Board of Health advises the Department of Health. Policy development includes consideration of political, organizational and community values. Good public policy development includes information sharing, citizen participation, compromise and consensus building. The process fosters shared ownership of the policy decisions. Policy makers review the recommendations and decide what needs to be done.

The development of health policy is unique because it uses a scientific knowledge base for decision making on issues that can directly impact all members of the community. It does not necessarily target individuals but rather deals with setting appropriate standards of good community health practices.

Effective policy making also leads to wise resource management within the public health agency. The better an agency understands its community mission, the more accountable its use of public resources will be. For those of us who have called Missouri home for most of our lives, we all understand how different our state is from border to border. While some policy development issues can be applied across county boundaries, many areas have unique health problems or issues that require a high level of understanding of good policy development so that local issues are properly addressed.



What will it require to do policy development & planning?

The Core Public Health Functions Task Force has defined the core function of Policy Development and Planning as:

Using scientific knowledge in decision-making about public health and leading the development of comprehensive public health policies and planning.

To carry out this function, we will need to do the following:

Principal Elements	Key Activities
<i>Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Lead the community in a systematic and periodic process to identify community priorities and desired outcomes.⇒ Formulate and prioritize alternative solutions.⇒ Develop strategies to achieve desired outcomes.⇒ Identify costs and effects of proposed strategies.
<i>Policy Analysis & Formulation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Review policies and procedures within the existing legal scope of authority.⇒ Involve the community in developing and analyzing policies of the public health jurisdiction.⇒ Identify community and agency resources.⇒ Identify costs and effects of proposed policies.
<i>Legal Authority Establishment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Identify the public health jurisdiction's legal authority to develop, implement, and enforce public health policy.⇒ Promote state and local legislation and regulation appropriate for implementing core public health functions.
<i>Policy Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Translate adopted policies into operating program procedures.⇒ Involve and educate affected parties and communities involved.
<i>Policy Evaluation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ Perform timely assessment of adopted policy(ies) and associated programs.⇒ Identify need for change in policy(ies) and/or programs, evaluate them on a regular basis, and communicate the findings.

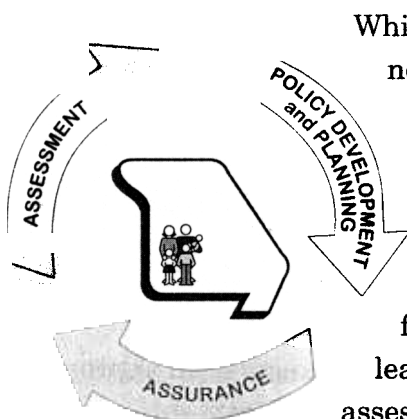
The Core Function of Assurance

Why is the assurance function important?

This function deals with getting the job done. While the public health agency must be able to see the health problems affecting its neighbors and communities and make public policy to deal with the problem, nothing is more important than shouldering the burden and getting the problem resolved. Assurance could be compared to the “arms, legs and heart.” All too often we see examples where a lot of work is spent in identifying issues and discussing what to do about it, but when it comes to doing the work, the energy and issues seem to get lost.

Assurance means making sure that needed health services and capacities are available. Assurance focuses on maintaining the capacity of public health agencies to manage their day-to-day operations and to provide the essential public health services. This would include maintaining the ability to respond to critical situations and emergencies, like disease outbreaks, natural disasters or product recalls.

This function also requires monitoring the quality of health services provided in both public and private sectors. Services for the community (normally called population-based), including health protection and health promotion are provided by the public health agency.



While it is the responsibility of government health agencies to assure that necessary health resources are available, the actual provision of health services can come from many sources, like private practitioners, non-profit agencies, health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and other community providers.

By most accounts, assurance is the most complex core public health function. It requires good resource management, strong community leadership skills and dedication to see the work completed. As with assessment and policy development/planning, assurance is a duty that can best be done by a well-trained state or local health agency.

What will it require to do the assurance function?

The Core Public Health Functions Task Force has defined the core function of assurance as:

Guaranteeing services necessary to achieve agreed upon public health goals by encouraging actions of others (public & private), requiring action through regulation, or by providing services.

To carry out this function, we will need to do the following:

Principal Elements	Key Activities
<i>Health Protection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Achieve compliance with appropriate laws and regulations related to public health protection activities and licensure or certification of providers and facilities. ⇒ Assure the competence of individuals whose activities can affect the health of the public who are not otherwise licensed or monitored by the state. ⇒ Maintain expertise adequate to implement protection activities. ⇒ Respond to emergencies through collaboration with communities in developing and implementing local and statewide emergency response plans, for natural and manmade disasters, including the mobilization of resources.
<i>Disease Prevention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Prevent or control diseases, illnesses and injury. ⇒ Assure that prevention and intervention efforts for communicable diseases and other preventable conditions are being appropriately implemented.
<i>Health Promotion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Assure communities have the information, resources, and strategies they need to maximize the health of their residents. ⇒ Assure the public has access to culturally appropriate, accurate, and current information that they need to make decisions about their health care options.
<i>Quality Standards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Assure that quality population-based care is provided according to established standards and guidelines. ⇒ Assure that all health care providers have access to ongoing training and continuing professional education.
<i>Access to Care</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Assure populations have access to personal health and safety services. ⇒ Collaborate with the community generally, and health care provider specifically, to reduce barriers to accessing health care and personal and preventive health services, and assure that individuals and families are linked with health services. ⇒ Assure an adequate supply and distribution of high quality provider services. ⇒ Assure populations have access to outreach services. ⇒ Assure populations have access to service coordination services. ⇒ Assure that infrastructure supports the reduction of barriers to access to services.

Structure of Missouri's Public Health System

How is it organized?

Missouri's public health system consists of 115 public agencies and over 2500 professionals serving at the local or state level. Local health departments are autonomous and are governed by either an elected board, a county commission/legislature or a city council. Most local health departments (85) were formed under Chapter 205 RSMo, which permits the voting of a tax to support local public health within a county. These health departments have an elected five-member Board of Trustees who set policy for their departments.

The other local health departments are also governed by elected officials. Over 20 counties have health departments supported by the county commission or county legislature. There are also seven city health departments that answer to their respective city councils. Local public health is publicly run and is directly accountable to local communities. This places Missouri's public health system in the unique position of providing leadership for the communities as changes in health care delivery occur over the next few years.

The state Department of Health is one of 13 executive departments in Missouri state government. The state director of health is a member of the Cabinet and reports directly to the Governor. The department has many legal and professional responsibilities, including regulation, licensure, technical support, emergency response, public education, and direct service provision.

The department has very strong ties to the local health departments, which it helps with funding, direct technical support, education and other services. Without doubt, the major supplier of public health services in Missouri are the local agencies, but the department provides essential direction and support to make this system work in the service to Missourians.

It should also be pointed out that in our state, other state agencies share public health responsibilities with the public health system. The Department of Natural Resources, for example, has many essential areas of responsibility for protecting Missourians. Some examples are regulation of public water supplies, air pollution control, water pollution control, and solid and toxic waste management. The Department of Public Safety is responsible for highway safety programs, emergency management, and highway and water safety, among others. The departments of Social Services and Mental Health have many health-related responsibilities involving direct or contracted services and health service funding. Also essential is the work done by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in their health-related programs and activities.

How will the core functions be implemented?

After a period of public review and comment by public health agencies, other health care providers, policy leaders and the general public local public health agencies began a thorough assessment of their current capacity to perform core public health functions. Many key activities are currently being performed daily by local public health agencies, while the capacity to perform others still needs to be developed. Local public health agencies are continuing to review their ability to perform the key activities of core public health functions and are expanding their capacities, as funding for infrastructure becomes available.

Each level of government, state and local, has roles to play in this new system. In many cases, there will be sharing of roles like the collection and analyzing of vital records (locals collect, state analyzes) and in other areas, the roles will be exclusive to the state or the local agency. The important thing to remember is the need for participation and leadership at all levels.



Visit our website: www.health.state.mo.us

As the Missouri Public Health System moves forward with the implementation of core public health functions visit our website to review our progress. If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions feel free to contact us.

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